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San Jose Unified board votes to divert two-thirds of Metro Ed budget to K-12

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San Jose Unified School District's board of trustees voted unanimously on Jan. 20 to carve away two-thirds of the money it provides Metro Ed.

During the 90-minute meeting, 15 people spoke on behalf of retaining the entire \$5.3 million for Metro Ed, while another 24 encouraged the board to reallocate the funds for use in K-12. The money will be used to restore the five furlough days taken last October, for intervention programs for middle school students and to bring back summer school and credit recovery programs for struggling students.

The cuts will force out about 5,000 of the current 7,000 adult education students, said Metro Ed superintendent Paul Hay. In addition, the district will lay off about 112 employees, including 80 to 90 teachers, about 30 classified employees and a handful of administrators, Hay said.

Metro Ed began planning for this scenario when SJUSD announced the proposal in December. "We held meetings with San Jose Unified's superintendent and CFO as well as the board of trustees," Hay said.

With plans already in place, it was easy for the adult education group to announce its consolidation. Its 50-plus and community interest programs will end June 30. As of July 1, plans include closing the Erikson Adult Education Center on Pearl Avenue, the San Jose Adult Education Center on E. Julian Street and Capitol High School, whose buildings are rented from the district. However, some of the outreach sites that use

other facilities, mainly community centers, will continue.

Core adult education programs; adult basic skills, ESL, career technical education, high school diploma and GED, will continue at the Central County Occupational Center located on Hillsdale Avenue. That building is owned by Metro Ed.

"The consolidation allows us to run programs at lower cost, but it's inconvenient because we will only be in one service area," Hay said, adding that some areas, including those near Julian Street, are most in need of the programs.

Hay doesn't lay the blame at the feet of district officials. "The board members were clear prior to the vote that they felt their priority was K-12, and they were under pressure to restore the five furlough and instructional days," he said.

"The districts that have taken money from their adult education programs have had to do so, because it would have been disastrous [for them] if they didn't have this alternative available," he said.

Instead, he called it "unfortunate that the state in its misguided wisdom included adult education funding as 'flexible funding' for school districts."

Things could get even worse for public K-12 school funds, he added, if the state's budget deficit can't be

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corrected. "We're in state budget Neverland.

The state could cut \$2 billion to \$8 billion from its education budget, he added. or funding could remain at current levels.

"Without question this was an extremely difficult decision for the board and for me," said SJUSD superintendent Vincent Matthews. He, too, blames the problem on the state Legislature. Echoing Hay, Matthews said he would like to see more leadership from the Legislature. "They passed the buck to us. It's a shame; we're all in the education boat together, and the funding keeps leaking out. There's no one in the room out to plug the hole."

Board trustee Leslie Reynolds agreed, adding that she doesn't know anyone who "dis-values" adult education, but finds that her elected office must focus on quality education for grades K-12.

"It is my obligation as a board member to represent the children of our district. The adults have other avenues to further their educations. All my decisions are based on what is best for the students." Reynolds said.

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